

February 3, 2022
Louise M. Weissman
Greenbelt, 20770

TESTIMONY ON (SB#0129/HB#0114) - POSITION: FAVORABLE
Access to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings

TO: Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Louise M. Weissman

My name is Louise Weissman. I am a resident of District 22 in Greenbelt. I am submitting this testimony in support of a favorable report on SB#0129/HB#0114, Access to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings

First, I would like to thank Senators Hettleman and Waldstreicher, the sponsors of this bill. I am the daughter and granddaughter of Jewish immigrants from Russia and Poland. Both sides of my family arrived in the States before the passage of the **1924 Johnson–Reed Act**. That act set quotas on the number of immigrants allowed in the U.S., especially Jews, Italians and Greeks .and it authorized the creation of the U.S. Border Patrol. Growing up, my family shared stories about their families' migration to the United States, explaining that coming here was a way to escape persecution as Jews. I was taught that we had an obligation to “Welcome the Stranger,” an act mentioned no less than 36 times in our Torah. I was reminded that as Jews, we were once strangers throughout the Jewish Diaspora.

My paternal grandparents came from Russia in 1904. My mom and her family came from Koretz (at that time Poland) shortly after WWI. Immigrating to the US saved the lives of my immediate and extended family who landed in the States and later were members of synagogues, members of communal support organizations and some, in unions. Growing up, I observed people in my community working to create a more just and compassionate world.

I strongly support organizations such as CASA which are led and supported directly by immigrants and who know how important legal representation is. I believe that all people deserve legal representation, whether they face deportation, eviction, or criminal penalties. To deny legal counsel is to deny due process.

All immigrants in Maryland, including those transferred by ICE to another state, deserve to have access to government-appointed lawyers. It is more critical than ever that those who have lived, worked or attended school in Maryland be granted legal representation if first detained in Maryland, but transferred to another ICE-friendly state.. **I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on SB#0129/HB#0114.**